Sociology 150: The Individual and Society  
Wellesley College, Spring 2015

Class Meets: Tuesday and Friday: 1:30-2:40
Professor Thomas Cushman  
Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00-12:30, PNE 334 (and by appointment)

This course is an interdisciplinary examination of the complex relationship between the individual and society. The course focused on a number of important and timeless questions that are fundamentally important for a liberal arts education: what does it mean to be human? What is a person? What is the nature of freedom? In what ways are human beings free and in what ways are we determined by forces outside our control? How do we forge identity, sincerity, and authenticity in a social world that often challenges us to be other than we wish to be? We look at classical and contemporary perspectives in order to deepen our understanding of the fascinating sociological idea of individuality, the philosophy of individualism, and the idea of freedom as these have emerged historically and in the modern world.

Readings:

The course is a reading intensive one and the following books are required and available in the bookstore:

J.S. Mill, On Liberty, Hackett 1978  
Gustav LeBon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind  
Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, Holt 1994  
Cass Sunstein, Why Societies Need Dissent, Harvard University Press 2003  

In addition, there are a number of core readings that must be done as assigned and these are available on Sakai.
**Course Policies:**

Attendance and participation at all class sessions is required. The course grade is based on the following:

1. **Four essays, six-eight pages:** 12.5 percent each
2. **Final examination:** 25 percent. You are responsible for all class lectures and readings on the examination.
3. **Attendance and participation:** 25 percent: Students should come to class having read all the material for each class period. Each week, I will post on Sakai some of the topics for focus in class discussion so you can prepare for more focused discussion in class. To facilitate class discussions, students will be called on and expected to participate. If you are not present, or prepared, this will be noted.
5. **Late papers are accepted, but on a very simple basis:** 1/2 a letter grade penalty for every day late, unless you have a valid, documented medical or family emergency provided by the class dean’s office in advance. *This policy is strictly enforced.* Students have the right to challenge a grade on a particular, assignment, though I reserve the right to revise the grade downward if, after discussion, I feel it is warranted.

**Statement on Open Discussion of Controversial Issues:** This course deals issues that are always provocative and controversial. A requirement of the class is a willingness to listen to and debate others’ points of view and a commitment to freedom of expression. There is no requirement to accept any view, but toleration is crucial. If you are not comfortable with lively and vigorous debate in which your views will be challenged and in which you may freely challenge others’ views (including the professor’s), you should not take this class. The willingness to engage in critical examination and critical re-thinking of what you think you know and what others think they know to be true is a central prerequisite for the class. There will not be any “trigger warnings” in this class. The phrase “I’m offended” indicates an emotional state, not an argument. One object of the class is to learn how to think and learning how to think means that you will experience some intellectual discomfort: consider this class as an exercise in learning how to manage that and actually grow from it.

**Course Outline and Schedule**

**January 27:** Introduction to the Class and Some Exercises: What is an “individual”? Some basic definitions: Individuality, Individualism, Individualization

**January 30-February 3:** The Pattern of History and the Individual
Read: Marcel Mauss, “A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self” ®
Plato, *The Republic,* Chapters XII-XIV ®
Varad Mehta, ‘The Stone is Everything’: Sparta and the Individual from Enlightenment to Revolution” ®
“Individualism in Classical Chinese Thought, at: http://www.iep.utm.edu/ind-chin/#H4
The Ten Commandments

**February 6**: The Enlightenment and the Rise of the Individual
John Locke, “The Second Treatise of the State of Nature” ®

**February 10**: The Enlightenment and the Individual (continued):
Begin reading J.S. Mill, On Liberty
Adam Smith, “The Division of Labor”, from The Wealth of Nations ®

**February 13-17**: J.S Mill on Liberty and the Individual: Philosophical and Sociological Foundations of Libertarian Thought
Read: John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, in entirety

**Paper One due, Monday, February 23, by 4:30 on Sakai**

**February 20-27**: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Society and the Individual:
Gustav LeBon on The Crowd and Unreason/ Emile Durkheim and Society Sui Generis
Read: Gustav LeBon, The Crowd: A Study in the Popular Mind, in entirety
Durkheim, “What is a Social Fact?” ®
Excerpt from “Le Suicide” ®
“Individual and Collective Representations” ®
“Division of Labor and Social Solidarity” ®

**March 3-6**: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Society and the Individual: Max Weber, Values, and Rationalization

**March 10-13**: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Society and the Individual: Karl Marx’s “Species Being”
Read: Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” ®
March 17: Why Are People Afraid of Freedom? The Perspective of Erich Fromm
Read: Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, read first three chapters

Second Paper Due, March 17, by 4:30 on Sakai

Spring Break March 19-29 (please read Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, the week before and during spring break)

March 31: Why Are People Afraid of Freedom? The Perspective of Erich Fromm (continued)
Read: Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, to completion

April 3-10: Conformity and the Individual: Role Theory
Read: George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”
The Milgram Experiments view “Obedience” on video reserve

April 14-21: Conformity, Dissent, and the Individual
Read: Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, chs. 1-4 for Friday and then chs. 5-7 & 9 for Tuesday.

Paper Three Due, April 24 by 4:30 on Sakai

April 24-May 1: Individualism in American Life
Read: Excerpts from Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*®
Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart*, Chs. 1-6, then Chs. 7-10

May 5-8: Freedom and the Individual in Modernity
Read, Fred Alford, *Rethinking Freedom? Why Freedom Has Lost Its Meaning and What Can Be Done to Save It*, Chs. 1-4, and then Chs. 5-7

Paper Four Due, May 8, by 4:30